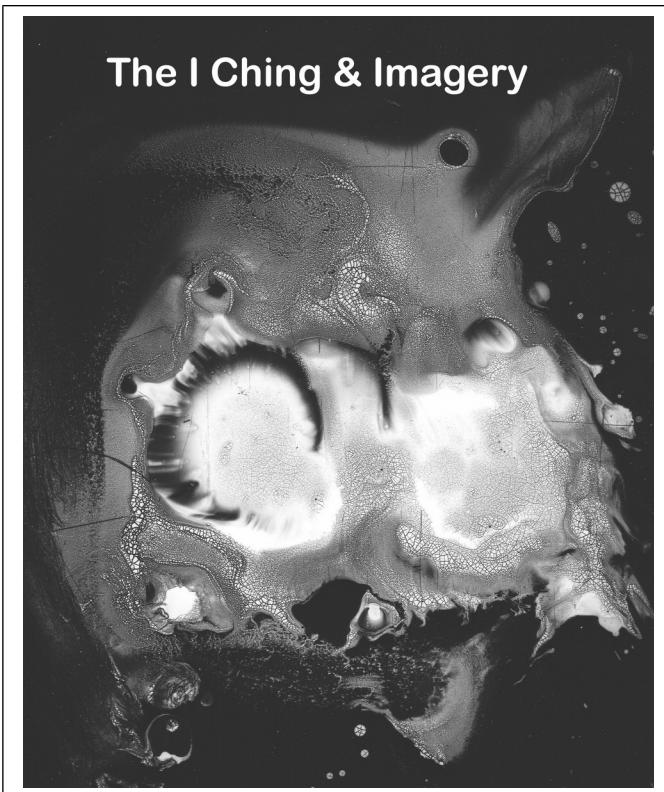


I Ching

And It's Use

In The Strange World

Between Imagery and Dreams



Research Article by Stuart A. Oring

Photograph by Jaromir Stephany

The use of the I Ching and other Synchronicity Systems, to help in the analysis of pictures, is based upon research and experimental studies that I have been carrying out since the early 1970's. But, records indicate that the ancient Chinese used the I Ching for the purpose of dream interpretation, as long ago as 240 B.C. And, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the psychiatrist Carl Jung used the I Ching in dream therapy for approximately 30 years.

Marie Louise von Franz was Jung's co-worker for many years. In her book: On Divination & Synchronicity: The Psychology of Meaningful Chance, Franz describes how these procedures can reveal what the existing probabilities are, what the psychological consequence might be in a given situation—as well as the psychological background involved.

Two important similarities, between dreams and visual images, suggest that Synchronicity Systems can be useful in the analysis of pictures. First of all, both dreams and visual images use symbols to express ideas or feelings that emanate from the unconscious. Secondly, the symbols of dreams and the symbolic answers of Synchronicity Systems originate from the same source within us. In dream incubation, we are able to ask our "higher self" a question—and obtain a symbolic answer to our question in return. Synchronicity Systems work in much the same way. If we meditate on our question, while consulting the oracle, we are

able to tap the unconscious source of wisdom that lies deep within us—and receive a symbolic response.

Analogy led to the idea that Synchronicity Systems might be useful in art interpretation. Testing the I Ching on my dreams and photographs—and finally on the photographs of Minor White and Jerry Stephany—confirmed that such methods do work to help in the understanding of visual images. After seeing my I Ching analysis of one of his photographs, Minor White wrote in a letter: "The I Ching version of the photograph is quite accurate! There is something in you that knew that. Otherwise the YE could not have interpreted accurately. How strange the YE is. It somehow gives voice to that something in us that knows everything there is to know!"<sup>1</sup>

Anton Ehrenzweig, who studied psychology and art in Vienna, researched and wrote a book entitled: The Hidden Order of Art under the auspices of the Bollingen Foundation. In this book, Ehrenzweig points out that we pick up more from the unconscious scanning of art than we are consciously aware of—and we do so more efficiently. Ehrenzweig believed that no detail, no matter how seemingly insignificant, should be overlooked because it may be important to the meaning of a picture. This leads to the inescapable necessity that we study every detail that might be useful to our understanding of a picture—whether we are

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to the author from Minor White dated April 13, 1970.

consciously aware of it or not. Interestingly, it is possible to tap into our unconscious to help reveal the great wealth of information about a visual image that lies hidden there. This can be accomplished by means of meditation, dream incubation, and the use of Synchronicity Systems (such as the I Ching).

The I Ching, and other Synchronicity Systems, can be used to help in the understanding of visual images by revealing the correct way to proceed in our analysis—or the direction that we should follow in order to help us better understand an image. These systems can help us to discriminate between whatever false beliefs we might have concerning a visual image and its inner truth. And, they can help us to proceed smoothly and to remain free of entanglements, which are often incorrect—such as, what we ourselves might project onto an image from the associations that arise within us. Most importantly, Synchronicity Systems very often lead to unintentional or unexpected insights in our study of visual images. They can lead us to the appropriate connections and relationships within a visual image.

When we consult Synchronicity Systems, we rouse our unconscious into action to help reveal that which is hidden from view. This allows us to analyze while remaining free from recklessness or error caused by the ego. Synchronicity Systems help us to avoid obstinately following the wrong path—and to avoid incorrect analysis based upon faulty attitudes, traditional

thinking, or our own inner conflicts. They tend to prevent us from snapping to judgments about an image through preconceived notions—and they help to keep us on track. When our logic is a product of inner conflict, these systems show us a way to understand an image that does not depend upon logic and they can help us to achieve objective contemplation.

By changing our attitude or perception of a visual image, these systems can help to melt away obstructions to our understanding. If there is something obstructing our attitude towards an image, they can help us to see the obstructing attitude and to change it or to see an image with a new attitude. When the obstructions in our attitude are overcome, creative energy is released thus allowing a correct understanding of the image.

Obstructions to a valid understanding and interpretation of a picture can be caused by numerous factors. These include such things as ambiguous figures; illusory contours or shapes; hidden or embedded figures; our mental set; insufficient motivation; lack of foreknowledge caused by life experiences; perceptual expectations; cultural, social, or personal considerations; emotional or intellectual considerations; variations in how viewers organize figures under some conditions; inability of the viewer to distinguish between the artist's intent and the viewer's own symbolical connotations (projection); blocks to

understanding; and the inability to adequately understand and interpret visual images.

The use of Synchronicity Systems in analysis is a way to monitor our inner feelings and obtain an analysis that is independent from our own feelings. In an analysis, it is important not to react to any elements that stimulate our emotions and cause a relaxation of inner discipline. If our attitude is perseveringly neutral, then our response will be correct; if not, the pressures of the moment will cause our ego to surface and spoil the good objective influences from an image that we should otherwise have.

We should not consciously attempt to incite responses to visual images, or to push matters along. Conscious manipulation springs from the ego; it does not allow natural response to proceed along its own course. Response to a visual image must be allowed to develop naturally. We should allow ourselves to be drawn along by the image and not by our preconceived notions. It is important to maintain our innocence of mind and independence of spirit. It is folly to allow ourselves to be influenced by pictures through words and logic. One should not try to only understand intellectually what must be achieved by the heart.

#### **How Synchronicity Systems Can Help Us To Understand Pictures**

Synchronicity Systems can help in the understanding of isolated or separate elements; to confront obstacles to understanding, illusions, and misunderstandings; to disperse what obstructs awareness; to help dissolve feelings and thoughts which lead to a rigid viewpoint; to stimulate the imagination and help free our thinking from unnecessary constraints; to help set limits to our understanding of what the image might mean (even though limitations are troublesome, they are effective); to free ourselves from the grip of emotions which can influence how we feel about an image (because we may lose our receptivity to the image); to provide new perceptions that allow us to break through and to allow the emergence of greater insight into the problem; to help us to wait quietly until impelled to action by a real influence and avoid approaches that may be superficial and insignificant (such approaches try to influence the viewer when there is nothing real or substantial behind it); to help us to support, reinforce, and strengthen our feelings about an image; to help us to see if our analysis is on track or not; to lead us away from putting meanings onto an image consciously that may hold dangers in doing so (projection); to help us conjoin separated parts that need to be brought into contact in order to enable us to make the appropriate connections and help us to perceive the relationships within the image; and, in the case of our own pictures; the use of Synchronicity Systems helps to avoid

impulses in analysis which are driven by emotions and the prodding of one's ego.

### **Synchronicity Systems Can Provide Insight About Picture Elements**

Synchronicity Systems can help provide insight about such elements as: the idea-feeling of the picture; the mental atmosphere surrounding the creative artist or photographer; the mental atmosphere surrounding a person in a photograph; the subject's emotional state; the essence of the subject or its essential qualities; the meaning of symbols; why various elements were included in the picture; the relationship of the subject to other things in the picture; the relationship between the subject and its environment; the relationship between various people or objects in the picture; and what else you should know about a picture that you are unaware of.

Synchronicity Systems often reveal surprising insights about pictures that are not possible to obtain in any other way. They are able to tap directly into our unconscious mind and reveal the great wealth of information about pictures that lies hidden there. By so doing, they enable us to use both our conscious and our subconscious mind in analysis—and to insure that our analysis is as comprehensive and accurate as possible.

### **Procedure For Using The I Ching In The Analysis Of A Picture**

The procedure that I follow in "I Ching Analysis" is to contemplate or meditate on the visual image (which I keep before me) for a short period of time. Then, I concentrate on my question and keep it in mind during the entire process of casting the hexagram. After the response of the I Ching has been noted and recorded, that response should be analyzed in relation to the visual image—and the interpretation of that image which you have obtained by more traditional methods.

When using this procedure, it is important that you understand how to use the I Ching effectively. And, it is important that this procedure be used along with other, more traditional methods for reading a picture, so that a comprehensive and accurate reading will result. If time permits, several advanced procedures should be used in the analysis of a visual image in order to produce an analysis that is as complete and insightful as possible. For example, it is possible to use contemplative meditation, dream working procedures and a variety of Synchronicity Systems in an analysis. By doing so, you will obtain additional insights concerning the image—and you will help to insure the accuracy of the analysis as well.

When using Synchronicity Systems in the interpretation of pictures, it is always advisable to use several different ones

for each question that you ask. Then, if they confirm your interpretation of the picture—which has been carried out by traditional means and they essentially agree with one another—then your interpretation of the picture is probably quite accurate. If two or more Synchronicity Systems provide similar information and insights, then your interpretation of what the responses of those systems might signify can be reasonably accurate. But, if one or more Synchronicity Systems do not agree with your overall analysis, then your analysis of the picture may be inaccurate. Or, you may have misinterpreted what the oracle's response may mean. In either case, it will be necessary to check your use and interpretation of the Synchronicity System(s) that are not in agreement with each other and your overall analysis as well. If your interpretation of a picture is on track, the responses that you receive from Synchronicity Systems should essentially agree with the rest of the interpretation—and they should provide insightful information concerning both the picture and the artist who created it.

### **Some Tips For Using The I Ching Effectively In Picture Analysis**

Two different randomization methods can be used in order to consult the I Ching. One method involves throwing three coins in a prescribed manner; the other requires the counting of yarrow

stalks. Both procedures are described in detail within the text of the I Ching. Because these methods vary in their randomization characteristics, the I Ching produces a somewhat different response according to the casting method that is used. A computer program may also be used if it exactly simulates the randomization probabilities inherent in the more traditional methods of casting the I Ching.

Information, useful to the analysis of a photograph (or work of art), can be derived from: the Image, the Judgment, the Primary Hexagram, Moving Lines (if they exist), the Change Hexagram, the Nuclear Hexagram, and the Trigram Attributes. Additional questions can provide you with even more information concerning a visual image. For example, you can use the I Ching to help you understand the visual symbols in a picture. Or, you can also use it to reveal the idea-feeling itself. Synchronicity Systems can answer questions concerning the mental atmosphere surround the artist—or the state of an artist's mental unconscious psyche at a particular time. And, they can help you to determine if your analysis is on track.

I Ching analysis can help you to accurately direct your reading of a picture so that you do not read into it what is not actually there. To achieve the most accurate and complete analysis possible, it would be useful to include: (1) a consultation of the I Ching using both the coin throwing and

yarrow stalk methods, (2) a study of the trigram attributes to determine if they support the analysis, (3) a study of the photograph using meditation and visual analysis in order to understand the visual symbols, (4) a correlation of all of the material, derived from the picture, to obtain as thorough an analysis as you possibly can, and (5) a check to see if your reading of the photograph actually agrees with the I Ching analysis. If you should find that the I Ching analysis does not confirm information that you derived from your reading of a picture, then it is very important to check your interpretation of the visual symbols in the picture and your interpretation of the I Ching as well.

I Ching analysis is an effective tool that can be used in the reading of visual images because it can verify or cast doubt upon our understanding of the visual symbols which are involved. Synchronicity Systems, however, should not be used by themselves. They should always be used along with other analytical procedures as part of a comprehensive and thorough analysis. When reading a picture, our intuitive feelings should always be supported by rational analysis and logic. If we fail to use a variety of effective procedures in picture analysis, then we are putting unnecessary limitations upon the information that we will be able to derive from the image. And, it is possible that we will misinterpret the meanings of the symbols which we obtain in

response to our question. But, when Synchronicity Systems are used along with various other procedures in an analysis, they can provide a penetrating look into the nature and inner structure of a visual image.

### **Example Analysis Of Alien Life Form Photograph**

Sometimes, pictures are messages from the subconscious of the artist—not unlike dreams. They may visually express unfulfilled wishes—or they may symbolize something that the artist is facing in life. One reasonable association, that we might make concerning this picture, is that it looks like some alien life-form from outer space—which blocks our path or confronts us. But, what might such a symbol mean for the artist?

When Synchronicity Systems were consulted concerning this picture, similar responses were received from the I Ching, Tarot Cards, and Runes. Although a single Tarot Card and a single Rune were used here, it is possible to use a wide variety of Tarot Card and Rune Spreads for this purpose—as well as any number of other Synchronicity Systems. Let us begin by asking the question: What is the subject's essential nature?

The I Ching response was: **Hexagram #38 Opposition** with the 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> lines being moving lines. The interpretation suggested that it is a time of separating paths. A "peeling

away" is called for. Opposition or divergent paths in the work is beginning to manifest itself. The response signified that events have not yet come to a conclusion but are nearing completion. The evolution is not yet complete. The subject, or photographer, may become isolated from the familiar but if he comes to something that is fundamentally a part of his being, in which he trusts completely, he will overcome the dangers of his isolation, he will achieve his aim.

Thus, the alien-like form might symbolize some creative new form, which needs to be confronted. And, the darkness, out of which this form is emerging, may symbolize that this creative new form exists in the unconscious. And so, the picture does not portray a space creature in outer space—but rather some new creative form that exists in the unconscious of the artist. The photographer's psyche was apparently seeking the release of new creative forms in the artist's work.

The Change Hexagram, **Hexagram #59 Dispersion**, suggests that the eventual outcome is to dissolve the blockage and disperse the vital energy damned up within the photographer.

Interestingly, other Synchronicity Systems gave similarly insightful responses. When the Tarot Cards were consulted, they gave **The World (Reversed)** and the interpretation suggested that events have not yet come to a conclusion, but are nearing completion—or that a project or set of circumstances is not yet

concluded—despite appearances to the contrary. Runes produced **Rune #4 (Retreat/Separation)** and means that this is a time of separating paths. “Old skins must be shed,” outmoded relationships discarded. A “peeling away” is called for.

I then asked the question: What is the subconscious reason the photographer responded? The I Ching response was **Hexagram #5 Waiting** with the first line a moving line.

The interpretation said: “Nourishment that is coming in its own time. You (meaning the photographer) were in a state of waiting but now destiny is at work. Fate will bring nourishment when it will and you should accept this. The moving line signifies that the new direction is impending. You are of this feeling. But, guard against a premature ‘waste of strength’ in this new direction or it will be a source of blame and weakness later.” The I Ching states that the new directions the photographer was seeking in his work would eventually lead to a drawing of an inexhaustible dispensing of new nourishment.

The Change Hexagram, **Hexagram #48 The Well**, suggests a pushing upward of the good elements by means of adaptability and encountering no obstructions. This will be accompanied by great success.

Then, I cast the I Ching using the yarrow stalk method instead of the coin toss method and received a different hexagram with additional insights. Now, I received **Hexagram #9 Taming Power Of**

The Small with moving lines in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> positions. The interpretation was "...There will be obstructions that impede and require you to tame and overcome them. You can eventually overcome them and achieve your standpoint by a culmination of small effects. Great caution will be called for. Be content with achievement as it comes, because to advance further before the appropriate time has come would lead to misfortune."

The Change Hexagram, **Hexagram #8 Holding Together**, suggests that the eventual outcome will probably be that the photographer's "guiding personality" will hold together and find in it a complement to his nature.

The Tarot Cards and Runes supported the I Ching reading. Tarot Cards yielded **#6 Wands (Reversed)**—which means delayed rewards. This card also signifies that "self-satisfaction" and creative rewards can be gained by pursuing a new direction in one's work. The Runes gave **Rune #1 (The Self)** and stated that there was a need for change in one's work because this was a time for "major growth and rectification" which had to come before progress. It was a time not to seek credit for accomplishments but to be content to do your task of change for the sake of play and losing yourself in your work. It was a time for interacting with resources and possibilities at one's fingertips.

I then asked the question: What is the actual meaning of the photograph? The I Ching produced **Hexagram #19 Approach** with the

3<sup>rd</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> lines being moving lines. This signifies: "light giving power" expanding from within to which you are receptive. The concept of 'approach,' especially the approach of what is strong and highly placed" in relation to what is lower-leading to the eventual outcome of nourishment. (This could mean that a more highly developed idea is replacing a lower one and a transition is taking place in the photographer's work. The symbol used to convey this idea is an image of something great and strong on the evolutionary scale that is approaching the spectator.) The Change Hexagram, **Hexagram #5 Nourishment**, says that nourishment comes in its own time and for this one must wait.

When I asked the same question, using the Yarrow Stalk method instead of the Coin Toss method, I obtained **Hexagram #14 Possession In Great Measure** with the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> lines being moving lines. The I Ching says: The fire in heaven above shines far, and all things stand out in the light and become manifest. (This may mean that new concepts have emerged in the photographer's work and they are rendered visible-as represented by the highly evolved creature that stands "manifested" before us.) Here, power is expressing itself in a controlled way. The Change Hexagram, **Hexagram #2 The Receptive**, suggests that the outcome may be obtained by being receptive to that which lies within and yielding to it.

Tarot Cards gave the **Hierophant (Reversed)**. This card can signify unconventionality, unorthodoxy, and openness to new ideas. The Runes gave **Rune #25 – The Unknowable**. This rune suggests that the photographer's most immediate contact is with his own true destiny. The work of self-change is progressing in his life. (This is echoed by the transition in his creative work.)

Finally, I asked the question: What feeling is the photographer trying to evoke? The I Ching gave **Hexagram #63 After Completion** with the 1<sup>st</sup> line a moving line. The interpretation said: There is a transition from confusion to order (new development from old) and everything is in its place even in particulars. The transition from the old to the new time is already accomplished. In principle, everything stands systematized and it is only in regard to details that "success" still needs to be achieved. The Change Hexagram is **Hexagram #39 Obstruction** and represents obstructions that appear in the course of time but which can and should be overcome.

The Coin Toss Method then gave **Hexagram #15 Modesty** with the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> lines being moving lines.

The I Ching says that the subject of the reading was trying to make a modest idea prosper—augmenting something that was only a modest idea. This "effect" took a long time to achieve. But, in the end it was easy to accomplish and was self-evident to the

photographer. The I Ching also states that the photographer wanted to pursue this "new transitional path" energetically, quickly, and easily—and carry it to its conclusion.

**Hexagram #17 Following** is the Change Hexagram. The idea of following in the sense of adaptation to the demands of the time grows out of this image. No situation can become favorable until one is able to adapt to it and avoid wearing himself/herself out with mistaken resistance.

Tarot Cards gave **The Tower (Reversed)**. This suggests that the photographer was "breaking free" from the oppression or imprisonment—in a set of circumstances that he felt he had to alter. The photographer had felt a need for a drastic change of circumstances because he felt that present conditions limited his individual freedom of expression.

The Runes gave **Rune #19 Disruptive Natural Forces** and suggests: change, freedom, invention and liberation. Drawing this rune indicates a pressing need within the psyche to break free from constricting identification with material reality—and to experience the world of the archetypal mind. When you draw this rune, expect "disruption" in your plans or previous ideas for it is the great awakener, although the form the awakening takes may vary.

After the analysis of this photograph had been completed, subsequent discussions with the photographer confirmed that the

responses of the Synchronicity Systems were quite accurate. His response to the analysis of his work was: "I cannot disagree with any of that."

When this photograph was made, the photographer Jaromir Stephany was agonizing over whether or not he should go off in a new direction with his creative work. A short time later, this innovative work culminated in a one-man exhibit, that expressed in overpowering visual imagery, the photographer's innermost feelings about our society and how we may be perceived by other forms of intelligent life. (The exhibit **Messages To The Cosmos** opened November 13, 1989 at Albin O. Kuhn Library & Gallery, at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

While there are many excellent books available on the I Ching, the Wilhelm/Baynes (or Bollingen edition) can help one see particularly well into the inner character or underlying truth of the visual image. Perhaps, this is due to the poetic nature of the written text. It was this edition of the I Ching that the world-renowned psychiatrist Carl Jung used in his therapeutic dream analysis work.

### **Recommended Reading**

Oring, Stuart. Understanding Pictures: theories, exercises, and procedures.  
Owings, Maryland: Isis Visual Communications, 1992.

Wilhelm, Richard. The I Ching or Book of Changes. Princeton, New Jersey:  
Princeton University Press, 1984.